

**REMARKS
BY
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Thank you for this honor.

I am keenly aware of the sacrifices you have made for our country. My father was a Navy aviator, a Douglas Gauntlett dive bomber pilot, who fought with courage and daring in all the major sea battles of the Pacific in WWII. Like so many of the Greatest Generation, he dedicated his life to service to his country. He died last month at the age of 87.

I would not want to equate our efforts at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana in any way to your experience in war fighting. Still, those of us who work at the Interests Section are engaged in a very real battle with tyranny.

In President Bush's second inaugural address, he reminded us -- those of you who have fought for our nation's freedom and those of us who battle on foreign shores to further the cause of freedom -- that "every man and woman on this Earth has rights and dignity and matchless value."

In that same inaugural address, President Bush pledged that the U.S. would work towards ending tyranny in the world. "To all those who live in tyranny and hopelessness," he declared, "the United States will not ignore your oppression, or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you."

Of course, President Bush wasn't talking just about Cuba -- but he gave heart to Cubans on the island and to those of us who represent the U.S. in Cuba.

The President was articulating simple, but inspiring, concepts. Tyrants deserve no respite. They should be challenged on all fronts. And those who suffer oppression deserve our support.

President Bush is committed to doing everything possible to hasten a peaceful transition in Cuba. I have the same commitment and so does my team in Havana -- and so will the next team of Foreign Service officers at the U.S. Interests Section.

We at the Interests Section support, both symbolically and practically, Cubans who are struggling against the tyranny of Castro. We try to be as courageous as the Cubans who publicly oppose the dictator.

In particular, I've tried to be creative in getting out our message to the Cuban people that freedom is coming. Our colleagues in Washington have welcomed our creativity. Well, sometimes the lawyers haven't initially liked some of our ideas, but we've prevailed more often than not.

We've reminded the world about pro-democracy, political prisoners locked in Castro's jails. You might recall our sign with the number "75" that we placed last Christmas on our grounds. Thanks to Castro's predictable overreaction -- which we banked on -- Cubans know that "75" represents the unjust imprisonment of 75 courageous, patriotic and idealistic Cubans.

I also had a mock Cuban punishment cell built, based on descriptions provided by that brave political prisoner and proponent of civil disobedience, Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet. It is also on our grounds for all to see.

On the practical side, we've developed creative ways to help Cubans surmount the Castro regime's information blockade. We've distributed hundreds of thousands of books, magazines, newspapers, and articles. We've provided free access to the Internet for independent journalists to file their stories, human rights activists to document their cases, and opposition members to communicate to sympathetic audiences off the island.

It boils down to transmitting hope. We are committed to transmitting the hope of a free, prosperous and happier Cuba to those struggling in Castro's failed experiment.

Those of you outside of Cuba can also bring some hope to Cubans on the island. Castro injects fear into the minds of Cubans on the island by telling them that a transition to democracy will bring Batista thugs back into power. He tells them that free schooling and access to good medical care will disappear. He tells them that black children will not be vaccinated and will be denied education. He tells the elderly that they will live a miserable retirement. He tells them that they will lose their housing to Miami Cubans. These lies have to be challenged with vision and facts.

Recall that Pope John Paul II told Cubans when he visited the island: "Don't be afraid." We must help average Cubans free themselves from the menacing policeman inside their own heads. Unshackling Cubans from almost a half century of oppression is a worthy struggle. It's a struggle that we can all help with, and one that will prepare Cubans for the bright future that certainly awaits them.